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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Joint letter from Italy and Spain on Social Conditionality in the CAP post-2027

Joint Letter from Italy and Spain

- To the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union
- To the Ministers of Agriculture of the Member States of the European Union

Subject: Social Conditionality in the post-2027 CAP – preserving a key achievement in support of high-quality and socially responsible agriculture.

Dear President,
Dear Colleagues,

In the context of the negotiations on the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), we wish to express our strong concern about the risk of social conditionality being removed and to call on the Council to recognise and preserve its essential role as an indispensable component of a fair and sustainable CAP that lives up to the expectations of European citizens.

The introduction of social conditionality through the **2021 CAP reform** marked a historic milestone for the European Union: for the first time, public support for agriculture was explicitly linked to compliance with specific provisions relating to labour rights and the health and safety of workers. This is a fundamental principle that must be maintained and protected.

The agricultural sector is built on the daily work of millions of people whose contribution is essential to ensuring food security, the vitality of rural areas, and the resilience of our supply chains. Yet the sector continues to face significant challenges, including high levels of job insecurity and risks to workers' health and safety.

Social conditionality does not represent an obstacle to agricultural activity. On the contrary, it helps ensure a level playing field by protecting farmers who comply with the rules from those who seek a competitive advantage through non-compliance with labour legislation and contractual obligations, to the detriment of workers and responsible businesses. Defending this mechanism therefore means safeguarding both workers' rights and the economic sustainability of agricultural holdings that operate in full compliance with the rules, and which clearly are the overwhelming majority of the sector.

We are fully aware of the need to simplify the CAP, reduce administrative burdens, and ensure the proportionate and effective implementation of its provisions. However, we believe that these objectives must be pursued without undermining European social achievements and without calling into question fundamental principles of fairness.

In this regard, it is important to clarify certain arguments that are being used to justify the removal of social conditionality.

Firstly, social conditionality does not introduce new, generalised bureaucratic obligations for farmers. The mechanism is based on compliance with existing labour law provisions and on the use of the monitoring and enforcement systems already established under national legal frameworks. As such, it does not impose any new general reporting requirements or documentation obligations. Administrative simplification should therefore not become a pretext for removing an essential safeguard. While some administrative burdens may arise for the competent authorities, the experience of our countries shows that these are manageable and can be effectively addressed once the social conditionality mechanism is up and running.

Secondly, social conditionality does not entail an unjustified duplication of sanctions. Labour law enforcement procedures and penalties are intended to ensure compliance with legal requirements and to protect workers. Social conditionality, by contrast, concerns the conditions under which European public funding may be granted and retained. These are two distinct yet complementary frameworks that serve different objectives. Compliance with the law should be a prerequisite for access to public support, not something external to the conditions governing its allocation. Moreover, the same principle already applies to certain aspects of other forms of conditionality.

Thirdly, social conditionality is fully consistent with the architecture of the CAP. For many years, European agricultural support has been made conditional upon compliance with requirements relating, among other aspects, to the environment, animal and plant health, and animal welfare. Extending this principle to respect for workers' rights represents a logical development, fully aligned with the European Union's economic, environmental and social objectives. The dignity of those working in agriculture must be an integral part of the responsibility associated with the use of European resources.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that this is a relatively new instrument. Although introduced by the 2021 CAP reform, its implementation in most Member States only began in 2025. Eliminating it before its effectiveness has been properly assessed would therefore be premature. At present, we do not yet have sufficient evidence to fully evaluate its impact and effectiveness.

For these reasons, we call on the Presidency and all Member States to preserve the principle that CAP support should remain linked to respect for workers' rights**.** Social conditionality is a new instrument that is neither bureaucratic nor difficult to implement. It offers a tangible opportunity to improve the living and working conditions of millions of agricultural workers who play a vital role in ensuring the food security of our continent and the sustainability of our agri-food value chains. At the same time, it makes a clear contribution to the key objective of reducing unfair competition in the agricultural sector.

The credibility of the CAP also depends on its ability to ensure that public support contributes to an economically viable agriculture, respectful of the environment and based on decent work.

Social conditionality is not a burden to be removed, but a principle to be defended and a tool to be made fully effective.

We therefore trust in the willingness of the Presidency and all Member States to work together to ensure that the future CAP does not roll back this important achievement but instead continues to promote a European agricultural model founded on the dignity of work, fair competition and the responsible use of public resources.

Yours sincerely,

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